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ABSTRACT

Critics of book publishing have over the centuries decried it as an enterprise of declining literary quality and increasing commercialism catering to the lowest tastes of mass culture. Yet a careful review of the data shows otherwise, that in America more people are reading more books about more serious subjects than ever before. However, publishing houses are changing, to keep up with changes in society and in its intellectual and commercial markets. A study looked at five national book publishers, of different complexions, all located in metropolitan Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Bonus Books, Contemporary Books, Scott Foresman's AARP Books, and Publications International. The data, derived from in-depth interviews with top executives of each of these houses, indicated that: (1) publishing executives are deeply aware of their role in transmitting culture and information to readers; (2) a profit motive drives all publishing executives, even those working for not-for-profit publishers; (3) there is no conspiracy among publishers to replace high-culture, low-selling books with low-culture, high-selling books; (4) the role of book publishing in American society is changing, but change does not mean deterioration; and (5) the current trend in book publishing is exploiting niches in the intellectual and commercial markets and filling them. (Thirty references are appended.) (Author/MS)

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Book Publishing in America, 1987.
Niche Books as a Solution to the Culture vs. Commerce Dilemma.

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Critics of book publishing have over the centuries decried it as an enterprise of declining literary quality and increasing commercialism catering to the lowest tastes of mass culture. Yet a careful review of the data shows otherwise, that in America more people are reading more books about more serious subjects than ever before.

However, publishing houses are changing, to keep up with changes in society and in its intellectual and commercial markets. This study looked at five national book publishers, of different complexions, all located in Metroplitan Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Bonus Books, Contemporary Books, Scott Foresman's AARP Books, and Publications International. The data, derived from in-depth interviews with top executives of each of these houses, indicate that:

--Publishing executives are deeply aware of their role in transmitting culture and information to readers.

--A profit motive drives all publishing executives, even those working for not-for-profit publishers.

--There is no consipracy among publishers to replace high-culture, low-selling books with low-culture, high-selling books. High culture books can sell well.

--The role of book publishing in American society is changing, but change does not mean deterioration.

--The current trend in book publishing is exploiting niches in the intellectual and commercial markets and filling them. Besides generating new sales, this new approach, by serving publics heretofore underserved or ignored, satisfies both horns of the culture vs. commercialism dilemma.

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"The book transcends time and space to announce, to expound, and to preserve and transmit knowledge." (Winger, 1964.)

Books contain and transmit a society's dearest nonmaterial possessions. As one publisher, Harris-Wolfe & Co., New York, stated, "Books are a sacred trust. Books are the chief depository of human knowledge and the vehicle whereby human culture is acquired and passed down through the ages." (Jackinson, p. 255) Even in this microfilm-videotape- communication satellite age, this is true.

Yet ever since its origin on clay tablets, probably in the third millenium B.C., (Winger, 1964) the book ever has been assailed by critics. In each society which has produced books the conflict between simultaneously cultural and commercial natures have lent publishers a schizophrenic complexion. Powell (1985, pp. 2-3) noted that the "tensions between the demands of commerce and the obligations of culture have persisted throughout the history of the book trade."

Contemporary critics of book publishers also are legion. Here is a sampling.

MacDonald (1953) wrote that Gresham's Law applied not only to money but to culture in our society and that "bad stuff drives out the good." He characterized what he called Mass Culture as a "spreading ooze."

Dutscher (1964) predicted that "inferiority of production is not an abnormality of contemporary literature but is its function," and that "rottenness pervades every area of book production and renders bad work inevitable."

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Augmenting bad books are poor readers, according to some. Winger (1964) quoted studies that show that "In the U.S. less than 20 percent [of those interviewed] were book readers." Nobel Novelist Saul Bellow (1987) felt that, "I am probably hard to read and I am likely to become harder as the illiteracy of the public increases." His colleague Bloom (1987, p. 62) made the similarly unscientific observation that on the college campus, "our students have lost the practice of and the taste for reading. They have not learned how to read, nor do they have the expectation of delight or improvement from reading."

Other critics have decried book publishers' growing commercialism. Hirsch (1985, p. 110) noted that, unlike authors and readers, the corporate mediators in publishing are part of the business world, which means that their drive for profit affects art and culture, in ways which are perennially debated. Whiteside (1981) described what he called The Blockbuster Complex among American book publishers, who are increasingly motivated by profit and the bottom line. Once a gentleman's calling, book publishing has entered the corporate conglomerate realm, he maintained. Its commercial force has generated books which are more show business than literature. A book's promotability, rather than its quality of writing and its contribution to knowledge and society, seems the main criterion for publication.

However, there are compelling data which counter such criticism and suggest that book publishing in America is healthy, both culturally and commercially. White (1957) noted that, "In 1955 youngsters set a record for borrowing books from public libraries." He felt that "The encouraging aspect of paperbound books is that the quality of the titles is constantly improving. He referred to Bellow's novel Augie March, which won the National Book Award in 1954: "Its trade edition sold only a moderate number of copies. In its paperbound edition, this novel has sold more than a million copies." These data suggest that despite Bellow's pessimism, the general public--even more than the elitist public--read his works, which are intellectual exercises rather than mindless adventure and sex books.

Among the anecdotal evidence is the experience of Chicago-area Attorney Scott Turow, whose 1987 book about a murder and subsequent trial, Presumed Innocent, was written under a $200,000 advance--the largest amount of money ever offered for a first novel by the publisher, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. It also earned an additional $3-million, again the largest sum ever paid for a first novel, this time for paperback reprint rights. And movie producer Sydney Pollack bid $1-million for its movie rights. (Bennett, 1987)

The combined critical and financial success of Turow's novel was not a fluke. Its writing was carefully crafted, rather what one would expect from a former Creative Writing Fellow at Stanford University, which he was. His first book, One L about his experiences as a student at Harvard Law School still sells. (Bennett, 1987)

The data also indicate that book publishing is at the center of a major phenomenon of this century, often called The Information Explosion. It is thriving, both economically, as a major medium of mass communication, and,

intellectually, as a major medium of free expression.

In 1986, a total of 52,637 new titles--brand new and new editions--were published in the United States, according to R.R. Bowker Co., publisher of Publishers Weekly, the book industry trade magazine (Grannis, 1987). This total of titles of books of all categories is slightly below the all-time figure of 53,380 titles achieved in 1983.

Bowker identified 23 standard subject categories of new titles, from Agriculture to Travel. A rank order listing of the five with the most titles in 1986 undercuts the argument that America is accelerating toward illiteracy and mindlessness.

Sociology & Economics	7,794	new	titles
Fiction	5,413	"	"
Medicine	3,554	"	"
Science	3,236	"	"
Juveniles	3,128	"	"

Jeffres (1986) noted that in the U.S.:

--in the nine years, 1963-1972, the total number of book publishers increased by 16.42 percent, from 936 to 1,120; and,

--in the 12 years, 1963-1975, the total number of book clubs increased by 71.21 percent, from 57 to 198; and,

--in the 23 years, 1960-1983, the total number of libraries increased by 34.32 percent, from 19,076 to 29,044.

Certainly, these data of themselves in no way constitute proof of the health of book writing, publishing, and reading in America. However, they strongly support the observation that in this country at this time more people are reading more books about more new subjects, which are written by more writers issued by more publishers, than ever before. Certainly the data do not support Dutscher's (1954) claim that a "puissant economic trend ...signal(s) the death of free expression in America."

The evidence indicates that profits and integrity are not mutually exclusive. Smith (1979) noted that "scholarly books sell." Hirsch (1985) found that "it remains unlikely that worthy books are going unpublished" and that "a sober consideration of the economic and organizational changes that have taken place in the book publishing industry suggests that their impact on the quantity of elite cultural products is less than critics would have us believe."

Ironically, only a handful of books and articles offer insight to the book publishing industry. These are easily classified into two groups: explanation of techniques for getting published, which are essentially instructions to would-be authors, and, memoirs of career editors and other

"intimate inside views" of book publishing houses and their authors and of literary agents. (Among these books: Applebaum and Evans, Bailey, Bingley, Dessauer, Gross, Jackinson). There are but few scientific studies aimed at learning how book publishing houses are organized, especially in relation to making decisions, and, in relation to the influence of the culture vs. commerce tension on the decision-making process.

The most notable recent studies have been conducted by Powell, alone and in collaboration with others, especially with Coser and Kadushin. The heart of the latter collaborative study was 98 interviews with 85 anonymous editors from 56 houses located, as the authors described, "mainly in the New York metropolitan area but also on the West Coast." (Coser, Kadushin, and Powell, 1982, p. xi.) Their sample was restricted to independent houses which each published 20 titles a year or more on subjects in social sciences and psychology. Included were publishers of college texts, monographs and other scholarly works; trade books; and, one university press. (Pp. 375-397)

Research Method.

This study was designed to analyze decision-making in publishing houses. Five publishing executives were surveyed in an attempt to gain a perspective of book publishers (also called "houses") today and how they are coping with the culture vs. commerce tension. Each executive is a decision-maker in a house of a different nature from the others which addresses its own kind of market of book buyers and readers.

While the sample is small, it afforded in-depth interviews, the data of which support previous findings of the health of American publishing in cultural and commercial terms. Also, the data go further than previous studies in revealing an important new trend which enables book publishers in America to survive the cross pressures of culture vs. commerce. As will be explained, this essentially is by taking new turns, progressing in new directions, and appealing to new categories of readers. In commercial terms, market pressures are forcing publishers to find new readers and to exploit means of distribution to them other than the book store. In cultural terms, more sophisticated readers require more specialized books and seek them in unique retail outlets. This latest effort, known in the book trade as Niche Publishing, thus satisfies both of these pressures which are imposed upon publishers.

This study is complementary to that of Cosin, Kadushin and Powell in that it was conducted six years later (in 1987) and included five publishers which are located in the Chicago area (a publishing center ignored in their study). Furthermore, the publishers included in this study range widely in size, ownership, orientation, and subject matter, and, are not anonymous.

They are:

1. **The University of Chicago Press**, founded in 1894, is the largest American university press, issuing 250 titles a year. It is operated as a self-supporting department of The University of Chicago.

2. **Scott, Foresman & Co.**, founded 97 years ago, is a subsidiary of Time, Inc. Its publication of 3,000 titles a year (including revised editions) makes it one of the nation's largest textbook publishers. Since 1983 Scott Foresman has had a cooperative venture with the American Association of Retired Persons (the world's largest membership organization, with rolls of 27-million), issuing seven or eight new titles a year, as AARP Books, for persons 50 years of age or older, which are primarily distributed by mail.

3. **Teach 'Em** is a private firm which publishes audio cassettes in the health-care management field and also publishes health-care management books under Pluribus Press and reference books for physicians under Precept Press; a sister firm publishes trade books under the imprint of Bonus Books. Each book division publishes about 12 titles a year.

4. **Contemporary Books** is an independent publisher and is the largest trade publisher outside of the New York area, issuing 167 titles a year.

5. **Publications International, Ltd.** publishes reference books, mainly aimed at consumers. Consumer Guide, its unique monthly publication, is circulated as a magazine, yet is frequently issued in softcover book format. Many of these issues are also republished as trade paperbacks and distributed to book stores by the paperback publisher New American Library. PI, which also packages special-subject books for distribution by it and/or other publishers, issues three or four titles a week.

Structured interviews, ranging in time from 45 to 120 minutes in length, were conducted with each of the following, in their offices:

Penelope Kaiserlian was associate director and head of the Editorial Department, The University of Chicago Press. She had been there since she left Penguin Books in New York in 1969.

A. Jean Lesher, executive editor of The Lifelong Learning Division of Scott, Foresman, and Editor-in-Chief of AARP Books, had been there four and half years years. She had previously been senior editor in charge of adult education books at Follett Publishing Co., Chicago.

Aaron Cohodes was president, publisher, and chief stockholder of Teach 'Em, which he founded in 1970. He started Bonus Books as a separate but sister company to publish trade books in 1985. Before going into business, he had been with McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. for six years as editor, first of The Modern Hospital and then of Nation's Schools magazines.

Harvey Plotnick was publisher, president, and major stockholder of Contemporary Books. The firm had been founded in 1946 as Henry Regnery Press,

which specialized in politically conservative books. Hired in 1964 as an editor when he was graduated from the University of Chicago, Plotnick became president in 1967 and changed its name and broadened its line in 1976.

Louis Weber, chairman of the board, publisher, and proprietor of Publications International Ltd., founded the firm in 1966, after starting Consumers Digest magazine in 1961 and selling it to his brother four years later.

Findings.

The data from the interviews with these executives (two women, three men) of five nationally- and internationally- distributed book publishers located in the Chicago area provide important insights into the social organization of publishing houses today. The findings address, also, the voiced concerns of MacDonald, Dutscher, Bellow, Bloom, and Whiteside.

While the interviews were wide-ranging, for the purposes of this paper only the data on those internal processes and routines affecting the decision to publish a manuscript are included. These data fall into the following four categories:

1. The executive's roles in the organization.

2. The decision-making process.

3. The executive's perception of his/her larger role in society.

4. The new strategy of niche publishing.

The Executive's Roles

The roles of the publishing house executive (with titles such as editor-in-chief, publisher, director) were those of facilitator, mediator, and consultant, as well as that of culture broker. Their organizations had to simultaneously satisfy two purposes: crafting books, and, staying in business. While the first purpose seemed the nobler of the two, it could only be served if the publishing house remained fiscally viable. This meant that its total operations had to produce a profit or "excess revenues" by the

end of each year.

Without a satisfactory bottom line, the line of books cannot continue to be published. Among the executives included in this study, Cohodes believed that, "without profits, there can be no culture" and Weber said, "90 percent of our books have to make money. We can live with 10 percent not making money." Even The University of Chicago Press, a nonprofit academic house, had to earn its own way. The only subsidy it received from its parent institution was some rent-free office space. Explained Kaiserlian, "We can publish many scholarly works but we have to have some that sell well enough to help the others."

It is the executive's role to foster decisions which achieve both purposes, producing books and profits. This role works best in a horizontal collegial organization, somewhat like the "brokerage administration" proposed by DiMaggio (1977). As one of the executives studied said (Cohodes), "We have a matrix system, with loose lines of authority. The routine decisions are made by a lot of people, but they all notify me of these decisions."

In all the publishing houses studied, each book project was the specific charge of one editor (often called the acquisitions editor), from idea to finished volume, from concept to reality. This editor was careful to inform the executive at each step of editing and production.

Each editor, once convinced of the worth of a manuscript and the competence of its author, became its sponsor and its advocate in conversations with the executive and other staff members. The editor was also the book's advocate at daily or weekly staff meetings with other editors and with sales representatives, and in consultations with the book designer, cover artist, typesetters, graphic artists, and even with the author, with whom he or she had formed a de facto project partnership. During all the stages of its editing, checking and production, the book was under the care and protection of its editor.

At AARP Books, this editor was usually a freelance, while at the other houses the editors were usually on staff. At The University of Chicago and Publications International, books were assigned to staff editors who had specific interest areas, such as (at the former) anthropology, art, history, physical sciences, or (as at the latter) cars, cooking, health, movies and video. At those two houses, the executives placed much faith in the judgments of the editors because of their knowledge of their special fields. Among the other houses studied, the executives' assignments of books to editors was more random, although attempts were made to match book subjects with editors' personal interests. Often, too, editors solicited and acquired book ideas or authors on their own.

However a book came under sponsorship of an editor, the executive's role was to check with the editor at crucial points. Explained Cohodes, "I play gadfly. I rely on my networks inside and outside. I don't interfere." Weber explained, "I'm a catalyst. I'm there to help, to get people to work things out with one another."

Decision-Making

Decisions on publication were seldom made on manuscripts which arrived unexpectedly by mail. Rather, publishers preferred to work with queries and proposals. Queries are letters which inquire as to whether the publisher would be interested in a book on a certain subject by a certain author. If the idea holds some interest to the publisher, the author will be asked to submit a proposal. Many authors prefer to submit proposals first. Elements of a proposal are: plot or outline of the proposed book, usually by chapter listings; a sample chapter or two; and, a general statement which makes the case for the book and cites the credentials and publishing record of the author(s). Sometimes, as in the case of Bonus Books and Publications International, editors preferred to originate ideas for books and seek out authors to execute these ideas.

Each book that was published represented two major decisions. One was to commit the author to write the manuscript; the other was to commit the publisher to publish the manuscript in book form by a certain date. These decisions were usually arrived at jointly by the editors and the executive and formalized in a contract with the author.

When the executive and editor agreed to accept an idea for a book, the first step in the decision-making process was achieved. With all but the university press, the next step was to consult with the marketing staff about the book's sales potential with general, special, and niche markets. AARP books and the university press routinely sent manuscripts to outside consultants for their opinions. The other three publishers only occasionally took this third step and only in cases in which the subject was one with which the editors were not very familiar, when there were important questions about the veracity of the manuscript and/or the author, and when the subject was controversial.

The university press was unique among the five houses studied for three reasons. First, it has no requirement to seek the marketing department's approval before a decision was made on a book project. Second, as stated, it routinely sent each manuscript to two outside referees for their opinions. Third, it had a formal ritual of approval for every book project: the Press's faculty board was the ultimate authority and had to be consulted on all publishing decisions.

At Contemporary, each acquisitions editor did his or her homework on a book idea that looked promising, explained at the daily staff meeting why it should be done, how it would be promoted, and who would buy it. When the marketing department and the editorial department agreed with the editor, the

project was undertaken and a contract offered. When there was disagreement, the executive made the decision. "Each of these matters are usually settled in our daily meetings in three to five minutes," Plotnik explained. "Last week, we decided on a $600,000 advance to an author in three minutes."

Executives said they tried to be reasonable in their decisions and sensitive to their editors' feelings about their projects. Weber said, "If the editor can convince me that I'm wrong then I may change my mind. It's happened."

Since book publishing is more art than science, editors' and executives' decisions were mostly based on their feelings about proposed book projects. Some called it "gut" or intuition, others call it informed judgment. With the feeling had to come opportunities, and, more and more, publishers were seeking new markets for new opportunities. One example was The University of Chicago's publication of The Founder's Constitution in January 1987. This was a compendium of documents, each related to a clause of the constitution at the time of the Founding Fathers. Press Director Morris Philipson saw a once-in-a-bicentennial opportunity, convinced his staff and his faculty board, and raised funds to subsidize its production. Similarly, editors at the Press sought government funds to subsidize the production of The Mosaics of San Marco of Venice, a four-volume art work they felt strongly should be published for art libraries, scholars, and collectors.

Nonprofit houses are not alone in such feelings. Publications International published The Pope in America in Summer 1987 on the basis of the executive's feeling that such a book ought to be published, that there was a market niche into which it would fit at that time. Weber explained, "I decided that it might be fun to capture the Pope's views, taken from prior speeches from around the world and collect them in a 'photo album.' I wanted to make it simple enough and beautiful enough and cheap enough so that people would buy it as a souvenir of his visit and could understand what the man is all about." The Pope book was Weber's project and he saw it through all stages of production, fully expecting it to lose money--which it did.

The pressures for acceptance or rejection of ideas and manuscripts came from both within and without each publishing house. Some of the greatest pressures came from the market place, whether that was the academic community, the 27-million members of AARP, or regular customers of book stores. The decision to publish was largely based on intuiting or "feeling" that specific publics would buy that book.

Each kind of publisher had its own specific pressures. In the case, of hardcover-book publishers, a significant amount of pressure came from the big chains, essentially Walden and Dalton, which had in excess of 100 bookstores each. Many books were born or aborted on the basis of the feelings of managers of such chains that there was or was not a market for these books.

Executives of AARP (headquartered in Washington, D.C.) lobbied heavily in Glenview, Ill., for books which the Scott Foresman executive and editors felt would not sell. Thus not every market niche can be filled; some are just too

small. Explained Lesher, "AARP would like us to publish lots of books we can't sell and people wouldn't buy. For instance, they would like us to publish a book which tells poor people how to improve their situations. As a publishing venture, that is not practical because there is no way for our books to reach the people who could use this information."

The university press also was under pressures which were not cultural or commercial but could be classified as collegial. That is, it was asked to publish specific books by academics, sometimes from chairmen of authors' departments who explained that tenure decisions rode on their decisions to publish or not, and sometimes from the authors' colleagues on the faculty of the University of Chicago. The staff also felt pressures from its faculty board to acquire more scholarly works. The board, for instance, was not overly happy about publishing A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, although it was the press's all-time best seller, with total sales of more than four million copies. The board felt somewhat similarly toward Isak Dinesen's Letters from Africa, 1914-1931 which became a big seller when it was tied in with the release of the movie, Out of Africa. This was a niche which was filled nicely, albeit too commercially for the board's tastes!

The executive and editors of the university press were not in an ivory tower insulated from worldly pressures. They also felt pressures from the conflict between culture and commerce, between their feelings and those of others about books which should be published, and, their feelings about books which would sell. Commented Kaiserlian, "It's strange that universities should be in business at all and we are certainly a business."

Niche publishing is an effort to resolve various kinds of competition. Weber explained, "We can't compete with the big guys, so we seek to identify niches in the market and try to fill them." Examples were Publications International's guides to Corvette cars and to baseball cards, and a book whose pages were pictures of rock stars which teenage readers could use as covers for their high school textbooks. Not all of PI's niche books were successful. A particular failure was the book, Getting Pests to Bug Off. Others, such as How to Win at Pac Man had lifetimes limited to the popularities of fads, in this case a very popular video game. The whole AARP Books line was another example of niche publishing. Scott Foresman identified the niche market of people over 50 years of age and enlisted AARP to help fill it, using mail order as its primary vehicle of sales. In a real sense, The University of Chicago Press also did niche publishing, particularly when it published esoteric books for specific kinds of academics. A recent example was Evolution and Entropy, in which biologists applied certain principles from the physical sciences to support their arguments about biological evolution.

Each book itself has an appropriate method of distribution, perhaps unique. Thus Contemporary Books novels are sold heavily in chain bookstores, while AARP books for senior citizens are sold mainly through the mail, and Publication International's baseball card guides are sold in baseball memorabilia stores.

The Executive's Perceived Role in Society.

Since the editors and publishing executives were quite conscious of their roles as brokers of culture, they expressed concerns about their roles in society.

Lesher explained, "I feel that I am contributing greatly to social improvement. I have to have that feeling to be an editor. I see books as conveying social values. I have to publish books which I feel are worthwhile. I wouldn't work in this job if I didn't feel that this line was worth my time. As I get older I get fussier about what I give my time to."

Kaiserlian explained, "It's very nice when we can bring something to people's attention and when one of our books can get a public debate going. I'm sure William Wilson's new book [The Truly Disadvantaged] is going to stimulate a lot of discussion about inner cities. It is also very nice to provide source materials where none existed before."

Plotnik explained, "My job is to fullfil what the public wants. That is crass, but it defines what is 'good.' We are pandering to the public taste. How else can we say what is 'good?'"

The executives do not agree that, as popular myth, McDonald, Dutscher, Bellow, Bloom, and Whiteside held, many 'good books' are not published because the pressures of sales have forced culture down, that some sort of Gresham's law applies to publishing as well as to finance. They pointed out that:

1. Great and established authors of fiction (such as Bellow) and learned critics of society (such as Bloom) do have their good books published, are successful, and do make money for themselves and their publishers, thus satisfying goals of both culture and commerce.

2. Few if any, "good" nonfiction books are not being published, simply because the market--that is, the public--demands more and more nonfiction books.

However, the executives agree that there are probably innovative writers of fiction who are unknown to the public and even to publishers whose works may not be published. Weber pointed out that "There are thousands of authors and only so many books that people will buy. This is complicated by the fact that older authors keep coming out with new books and editors play it safe and go with the track record and so are more likely to publish their works than those of unknown authors."

Plotnik believed, "There are no superbooks which are not being published. There is some poetry that is not being published by commercial houses, but then people who read poetry don't expect commercial houses to publish lots of poetry, but rather expect it to be published by small houses that specialize in poetry."

Cohodes declared that, "Some books deserve to be published, others demand to be published. There are a lot of good books that do not elicit enough interest to be worthwhile and won't generate enough income and they are not great enough literature. We publish books because we want to publish them. The first order of business is to stay in business."

Lesher observed that, "We get proposals for books which I would love to work on, such as on the subject of peace, which I am very interested in. But I know that from a commercial standpoint they wouldn't sell. I have to always ask, 'How many people out there would pay money to read it?' I feel good that there are other publishers, nonprofit houses, which would publish such books. It's a balancing act, in a sense. There are always ethical sorts of choices to be made."

Discussion.

Book publishers resemble other producers of mass cultural artifacts, such as music publishers and recording companies, in that they are the organizations in the middle, the brokers who link creators to audiences, who help bring culture to the public. In America's free-enterprise, capitalistic economic system, publishers do this for a price as they gather revenues for the creators and producers of the work. The more popularly successful the brokers are in catering to the public's cultural tastes and informational needs, the more economically successful they are likely to be. The two kinds of success usually go together.

From a cultural perspective, publishing companies (or more correctly, executives and editors who work for them) determine which writings--and, therefore, the ideas and information--a society will have available to it of which story-tellers, essayists, fact-gatherers, scholars, and analysts.

As "middlemen," publishing houses are largely unknown to the public. Hirsch (1985) noted that, "The field of cultural endeavors is relatively unusual in that we strongly desire to reward our creators and to commune with their audiences, but avoid or ignore the organizational mediators linking each to the other." Yet they are the agencies which produce and distribute books. They have power over decisions such as whether an author's work will be published and how widely (or narrowly) it will be publicized. The

publisher's efforts (or lack thereof) also determine in large part how much money and fame (if any) the author will derive from The Work (as a book manuscript is called in the trade and in the U.S. copyright law). Yet as this study has shown, the successful publishing executive's decisions are not based on his or her own personal likes and dislikes but on his or her feel for the wants and needs of the markets--both the marketplace of ideas and the marketplace of commerce.

Yet book publishing is a highly competitive and low-profit business subject to the whim of popular tastes. Powell (1979, p. 49) noted that, "each book is a discrete, individual item that must be edited, produced, and promoted as an individual entity. Each book is written by a different author on a distinct subject with appeal to a specific audience." He adds that because of this unique-product production, book publishing is organized on a horizontal rather than vertical hierarchy and operates in collegial rather than bureaucratic fashion.

This study confirms thay in order to produce the discrete, individual items which are books, publishing houses are organized more horizontally than vertically, in collegial rather than bureaucratic fashion. (Powell, 1979) According to Turow (1983), "administration in book publishing varies along a continuum, between strict bureaucratic style and the strict craft style. The production of symbols is, by its very nature, a process of creative variation which is generally felt to require skills that a business administrator alone does not have or does not have the time to exercise."

All five of the publishers surveyed in this study operated their decision-making machinery on a horizontal base which at times appeared even casual. Another factor is the heavy reliance on outside sources, such as authors, agents, graphic designers, typesetters, printers, publicists, and reviewers.

DiMaggio (1977) proposed a model to explain how culture-producing industries, such as book publishing, which must make profits, survive in the fickle marketplace of ideas. Thus, in his three-culture model, "Television, textbooks, and to a lesser extent, mass-market paperback fiction are **mass-cultural**, presenting similar materials to a wide range of audiences. Ethnic magazines and recording companies, the foreign-language press, pulp magazines, and high-culture producers are **class-cultural**...Trade publishers, most record companies, and much of the magazine industry are **pluralistic** in that they supply diverse materials to overlapping and shifting special-interest audiences through common market channels." (Emphasis added.) Yet this survey indicates that the DiMaggio boundaries, constructed on some formal images of the past, are today quite fuzzy. Books (such as those produced by Publications International and AARP) have invaded magazine territory and are now marketed class culturally and pluralistically.

The key decision which every publishing organization must regularly make has to do with which manuscripts it will publish as books (and which not). The decision to publish is the focal point upon which converge all considerations, including: cultural, intellectual, societal, literary,

commercial, track record, and reputation. These days every house wants to pick at least one book per season which becomes a best seller. Few are able to accomplish that. Nor have they been helped by studies which shed light on the Best Seller phenomenon. Such studies have been scarce and retrospective. (See Cawelti, Ellery, Purcell, and van Benschoten).

This study confirms the observation of Coser, Kadushin, and Powell (1982) that decisions to publish are arrived at differently in different houses. Some houses depend on the judgment of outside readers, others engage in informal discussions among editors, others rely on one editor's judgment. All of this occurs at different times. Marketing has gained even more weight as a factor since their study and their finding that, "Most editors are more concerned with sales now than they were five years ago."

All this means that, as this study confirms, no matter their size and nature, publishing companies are organized to make decisions to publish books which will satisfy their cultural and economic interests and have enough flexibility to change their approaches to satisfy new markets of readers.

Whether a form of Gresham's law applies to book publishing, in that bad books drive out good, is a matter of perception. However, industry statistics and data from this study do not support the view that publishing is in a crisis in America, that the corrupting ooze is spreading. Despite the earlier forebodings of McDonald, and Dutscher and the more recent criticism of Bellow, Bloom, and Whiteside, good books are still around, and new ones are being published.

This study also goes beyond previous investigations in that it provides new data to help us understand how publishers are able to survive in highly competitive marketplaces of ideas and commerce and under the heavy pressures of culture and commerce. This is by developing new kinds of books for new and previously unexploited publics of readers who heretofore have been ignored, such as biological evolutionists and baseball card collectors. Thus publishers serve all their pressures, producing profits from sales of new kinds of books to new segments of the public who haven't been served before or, at least, not as well.

Conclusion.

This study of the executives of five publishers of varying complexions based in the Chicago area has its limits and cannot completely represent the entire universe of publishing in American society. But within these limits, which are broad since the publishers are all national or international in scope and sales, the data gathered can provide the rough brush strokes to form an image of publishing organizations and can yield broad insights into

how these houses are organized to make decisions based on perceptions of changes in the society.

The publishers in this study each was originally organized to serve particular segments of the reading public, and more recently to serve special niches in the public which were perceived as needing special books:

--Contemporary Books and Bonus Books served the general reading public, which is the backbone of the book market, then identified special areas for special books, self-help health books in the case of the former and books by prominent sports figures in the case of the latter.

-- Publications International served the consumer culture that is manifest in America, then identified special areas of this culture to serve.

-- AARP Books was organized to serve the growing segment of the literate population older than 50 years which has disposable funds.

--Teach 'Em served key players--trustees and administrators of hospitals and physicians--in one of the largest industries, the health-care industry.

--The University of Chicago Press was intended to serve intellectual, reading publics and its own and other academic faculties. It has branched off into other directions, such as a best selling book by the author of Out of Africa.

The data in this study indicate that those editors and other executives in the industry who make decisions about publishing books are aware of their role as culture brokers and sensitive and concerned about the culture vs. commerce conflict. At the same time, however, they are part of an industry which exists in a free enterprise, capitalistic economy where survival depends on profits, where, as one publisher expressed it, "the first order of business is to stay in business." Interestingly, this is as true for the not-for-profit academic publisher as it is for the commercial publisher. (See also DiMaggio, 1977.)

The picture of American publishing, as viewed from this study, is not a lowering of all culture into popular culture but instead a proliferation of additional, new cultural artifacts which are produced in response to the needs of different segments of society. This picture is not one of debasement of cultural standards but one of sensitivity to both existing and potential markets (new readers) and subsequent changes in direction to meet those markets' (new readers') needs.

As an institution, book publishing is organic and is changing in response to the needs of its changing society. Society is better and more completely served as a result of these changes. So, "niche publishing" is not only a market strategy but also a means of transmitting culture and data to segments of the public which have not been otherwise served, or even served as well.

At the same time, publishers have also found new ways of distributing

their cultural artifacts. That means not ony through book stores but also through the mail, through membership organizations, through book clubs (general and special interest) through news distributors, and through other publishers. As Turow has observed (1983), channels shape products, and vice versa.

This does not mean that publishing houses are as efficient or as altruistic as they could be. Also, there are shortcomings in our society. Perhaps because of the competition from other mass media, the reading of books is not as revered as it once was and not practiced as intensively as it is in other societies. West Germany, for instance, with a population of about 65-million, has as many book stores (about 10,000) as has the U.S., with its four times greater population of about 250-million. These and other factors are important for a truly global perspective of American book publishing.

Finally, five points need emphasis:

1. Publishing executives are deeply aware of their role in transmitting culture and information to readers.

2. A profit motive drives the decisions of executives and editors, even among not-for-profit publishers.

3. There is no conspiracy among publishers to replace high-culture, low-selling books with low-culture, high-selling books. Books like Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind personify the high-culture, high-selling book.

4. The role of book publishing in America is changing, just as are other institutions in this society, but change does not necessarilly mean deterioration or disintegration.

5. The current trend in book publishing is to exploit commercial and intellectual niches in the market.

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